

Town of Sea Bright  
(Town of Nauvoo)  
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail  
Intersection of State Route 36 and  
County Road 520

Sea Bright  
Monmouth County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1000

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### TOWN OF SEA BRIGHT (Town of Nauvoo)

HABS No. NJ-1000

- Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, Intersection of State Route 36 and County Road 520, Sea Bright, Monmouth County, New Jersey.
- Significance: Sea Bright is representative of the northern New Jersey shore-resort development resulting from the coming of the railroad. During the 1860s, the completion of the Raritan and Delaware Railroad lines to New York and the Long Branch and Seashore lines along the beaches, signaled the opening of the shore to extensive resort growth.
- History: One of the "gayest resorts," by the time Kobbe wrote his 1889 guidebook, Sea Bright's history as a vacation spot began in 1869 when Long Branch and Seashore railroad contractor Mifflin Paul purchased land along the strip of sand with its newly laid tracks. Its spectacular position on a narrow barrier island between the Atlantic Ocean and Shrewsbury River, at the foot of Sandy Hook and today under the eyes of Twin Lights lighthouse, was exploited with some finesse in the nineteenth century. The town grew around the Octagon Hotel and the little summer cottages built by Paul and two other contractors, William W. Shippen and Samuel Bayard.<sup>1</sup> The first bridge to Rumson Neck, the Jumping-Point Bridge, completed in 1869, improved access to markets in Red Bank. Sea Bright obtained additional supplies and inspiration from nearby Long Branch. A 1917 history remarked on the busy social relationship between the two seaside resorts in the early 1880s.

Sea Bright could not but be a brilliant colony; and it was. Those were the days of magnificent equipages; when the Ocean Driveway at Long Branch was jammed every summer afternoon with the most wonderfully gowned women and the finest horseflesh then to be found in this country. As late as 1881 this driveway was crowded as tightly with horses and vehicles as Fifth Avenue, New York is now on Saturday afternoon in the winter time, and it was a much gayer sight. Sea Bright partook of this gaiety, and the Octagon Hotel was its northern boundary; for after Ocean Avenue was extended to Sea Bright village, and the Rumson Bridge built, driving parties could extend their drives through Sea Bright along the Rumson Road.<sup>2</sup>

By 1889 both sides of the bridge offered tennis courts and the Sea Bright Lawn-Tennis and Cricket Club stood on Rumson Road, near the Jumping Point. The five-acre grounds included lawns for cricket, baseball, tennis and bowling. Foreign teams on American tours played summer matches in Sea Bright and visited the clubhouse complete with ballroom and theater.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George H. Moss, Jr., Another Look at Nauvoo to the Hook (Sea Bright, NJ: Ploughshare Press, 1990), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Charles A. Boston, "The History of Sea Bright and the Purposes of the Association" (Sea Bright Improvement Assoc., 1917), 11-13.

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Kobbe, The Jersey Coast and Pines: An Illustrated Guide-Book with Road Maps (1889, reprint, Baltimore: Gateway Press Inc., 1977), 18.

Twenty years prior to the establishment of the flourishing summer society of Sea Bright, the area was a fishing village called "Nauvoo," a Sephardic Hebrew word meaning "beautiful or pleasant place."<sup>4</sup> The maritime community drew fishermen from up and down the Shrewsbury River, becoming "the largest fishery on the coast" by the end of the century. Local bluefish, bass and weakfish, as well as clams and crabs, kept Sea Bright and Long Branch hotels stocked with fresh seafood. Though the wood-frame dories called skiffs used by Nauvoo fishermen predate the founding of Sea Bright, these popular fishing boats became known as Sea Bright skiffs in the early twentieth century. The boats were used up and down the shore, particularly in the fishing village of Galilee near Monmouth Beach and in Long Branch near the end of Troutman Avenue.<sup>5</sup>

Today, Sea Bright has lost much of its sublime character in its fight with the Atlantic Ocean and human competition for its tiny, fragile, land area. The beach has been washed away by relentless north-flowing Atlantic currents requiring high, costly-to-maintain, stone and concrete barrier walls to be constructed off of Ocean Avenue. The road itself, heavily used and difficult for pedestrians to cross, is an anonymous jumble of twentieth century roadside businesses, overhead power lines, and so many condominiums that Sea Bright has been called "Townhouse Town."<sup>6</sup> One by one, town landmarks, including the Octagon Hotel, Peninsula Hotel and Hotel Pannaci, have been altered or destroyed, often replaced by parking lots. Thus this old seaside community is left with mainly a paper history, which survives in books, photographs, and old postcards. Some venerable buildings remain in the business block on Ocean Avenue facing the sea. In 1963, the eclectic, brick Sea Bright National Bank was remodeled to an earlier period by architect Gerard Barba. The Daily Register declared that it "points to the fact that colonial style architecture never grows old."<sup>7</sup> The cottage-like U.S. Lifesaving Station No. 3, a board-and-batten structure built in 1878, now a private home on Ocean Avenue, is a rare link to Sea Bright's nautical heritage.

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<sup>4</sup> Sherry Figdore, "All-year Appeal Growing" Asbury Park Press (ca. 1990), H1.

<sup>5</sup> Peter J. Guthorn, The Sea Bright Skiff and Other Jersey Shore Boats (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Pike, "The 'Townhouse Town' Faces Construction Ban," Asbury Park Press (November 1, 1981), np.

<sup>7</sup> "Before and after photos..." The Daily Register (August 21, 1963), 28.

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Sources

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Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatzka (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.